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PUBLIC VIRTUE.

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A POEM.

In Three BOOKS.

BOOK I.

Inscrib'd to the RIGHT HONOURABLE

HENRY PELHAM, Esq;

Utile proposuit nobis Exemplar. HOR.

By GEORGE LILLYTIMBER, of *Gray's-Inn*, Esq;

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BOOK I.

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By GEORGE SPILSBURY, of Gray's-Inn, Esq;

LONDON:

BRITISH MUSEUM

ON

PUBLIC VIRTUE.

BOOK I.

ON publick virtue if the lyre be ſtrung,
The lay muſt ſtill be crown'd with *Pelham*'s name:
His own example, and the awful theme,
Make him the unknown patron of my verſe,
Yet tho' ſhe pays this tribute to his worth,
By no mean flatt'ry, ſhall the conſcious muſe,

Herſelf abaſing, his protection claim:
Or try to tell what ev'ry *Briton* knows,
His merit:—which muſt ſuffer by her praiſe.
In virtue's cauſe ſhe claims him for her friend;
And hopes, while from a nation's care retir'd,
His candour may approve, the proſe-like moral lay.

PUBLIC VIRTUE.

Goodneſs is greatneſs. This eternal truth
In theory none: in practice, thoſe deny
Whom cuſtom, the fools freehold, ſtiles the great.
While from that added title, ſome derive
New pow'r of dealing miſchiefs on mankind:
Others, at beſt, are negatively good.
Yet thoſe, who ſtand diſtinguiſh'd by their crimes,
We fear becauſe we feel, but cannot love.
And ſure, to them who walk thro' life's wide round
In ſenſeleſs apathy,—No praiſe is due,
In our horizon if thoſe orbs appear,

Gaily

Gaily a-while to glitter o'er our heads,
And then be ſhut from view, how ſmall their uſe!
How far from real ſplendour! all muſt own
Faintly they ſhine, whoſe uninforming rays
Can only flatt'ry's ranker weed produce.

Yet to acquire vain popular applauſe,
To catch attention from that vulgar herd
Which gaze and envy without asking why:
Air-blown ambition impotently ſeeks
A nearer path to grandeur and renown.
Not from ſuperior virtue, not the toils
Which ſlowly mark the ſteep aſcent to fame:
But purchas'd honours, uſeleſs pedigrees,
The ſycophant's hot breath, the praiſe of fools,
The lowly couchings, the perſuaſive ſmiles,
The tricks which ſlaves imploy, to gratify
The richeſt, proudeſt, meaneſt, of mankind.

And are there none who in an iron age
Of vice, and folly ſtudiouſly acquir'd,
Dare tell the vain imaginary great
How little they deſerve? the deathleſs muſe
From ermin'd pride, which treads on abject ſlaves
Has nought to hope, or fear: if thou inſpire,
Thrice ſacred virtue! ſhe at thy command
Shall raiſe her voice, to catch thy vot'ry's ear,
And drive away the vulgar and profane.

Lead me, bright goddeſs, to the throne of kings,
Whoſe feet on ſceptres and tiara's tread;
Who like *Salmoneus*, mad to be ador'd,
Are ecchoing back the thunder of the ſkies;
Thoſe lords of miſchief, honour'd by our fears,
Whoſe pow'r is known and meaſur'd by their crimes.

There will I enter, unperceiv'd of all;
A cloud ſhall wrap me round; leſt violence
The ſtranger and unwelcome gueſt aſſail:
Thy hand ſhall guide my ſtep, nor will I fear,
The ambient veil remov'd, to utter truths
Worthy of thee. ------
Truths, which ſlaves dare not ſpeak, and princes will not hear.

Ye mighty tyrants, at whoſe awful nod,
Millions of ſlaves without a murmur die;
All you who claim to lord it o'er mankind
Bow your aſpiring heads: attend and learn
How weak is the preſcriptive right to pow'r,
How nodding to its fall, the cumbrous pile
Which is not rais'd on Virtue's ſolid baſe.

Virtue

Virtue is fame: all elſe is infamy,
And high diſgrace, and eminent reproach.

Say whence your boaſted honours proudly flow,
And of each vain pretence yourſelves decide?
Is it the mighty race by ſire to ſon
From age to age in purer ſtreams convey'd?
A claim oft falſe, — when true, a fancied good:
Ev'n poverty outgoes thee; — for behold
While unnerv'd riot her pale ſons laments,
Gay health, the peaſants envied legacy,
Rewards his ſtrong and vigorous embrace.

Or is your plea to pow'r, that wealth alone
Drinks deep of happineſs? the round of days
In flatt'ring follies loſt, the tedious hours
Which fill the ſad vacuities of life,

Spent

Spent not enjoy'd,—declare how vain the hope
With fancied good to combat real ill;
While the deluſion proves, how envied he,
Who ſings uncareful while he turns the glebe!

Does the rich goblet with reflected pride
Give the vain owner one ſubſtantial joy?
Can the attendant ſlaves obſequious care
Remove the ſword impending from a thread?
Ye wretched great, avoid the poiſon'd cup;
Fly from the thouſand ills ambition brings:
Have you no refuge left? alas! how poor!
Fly to that humble cell where innocence reſides.

Since then on pow'r no happineſs awaits;
On wealth, accumulated wants attend;
And pride kills its own hopes; while virtue pleads,
That ſmall ſtill voice of nature in our ſouls,

That inſtinct from above which cannot err,
Attentive mark her didaſcalic lay.

She plac'd you in the zenith of your pow'r,
Not idly to be gaz'd at and ador'd;
Or baneful as the burſting comets fires
To trail your ſhining ruin thro' the ſkies:
Nor yet with *Epicurus* gods, t' indulge
Eternal negligence of ev'ry good.
Protection is the debt which greatneſs owes
To lowly ſtations; for that good obtain'd
Obedience is return'd: but no regard
Is due to pow'r, if exercis'd in ill;
Or wealth, unleſs the bleſſing, to a world
Flows amply, from the lib'ral owner's hand.

Ambition early in the human mind
Calls forth her hidden fires; yet few contend

For

For real greatneſs from ſuperior virtue:
All aim at happineſs; yet thoſe alone
Are truly happy, who themſelves ſubdue.
While fortune bears us down the tide of life,
Our actions flow but as our paſſions ſpring;
If thoſe are regular, years glide away
Serene and gentle as the ſilver *Thames*:
But if the ſoul, now here now there is toſt
Tumultuous, — by conflicting paſſions rage
And like the face of nature when deform'd
By warring elements, life's dreadful hours
Are raging as the rough *Biſcayan* ſea.

How light, how inconſiſtent is mankind!
How blind, irreſolute, uncertain, vain!
A momentary bladder rais'd by pride,
Which the leaſt atom of ſuperior force
To its primæval nothing can reduce.

A lordly reptile impotently great;
Which enterprizing more than man can do,
Does nothing thro' the lengthen'd ſcene of life,
But at an hundred is ſurpriz'd at death:
Complaining much how ſhort a ſpace is giv'n,
Yet of that ſpace profuſely negligent.
Purſuing ever what he muſt abhor,
Avoiding ever what he ſhould purſue.
Whoſe pompous ſchemes, which riſe and fall by turns,
Are baſeleſs viſions, like a ſick man's dream.
So *wiſe* he is, he toils to be undone,
Rejects the wiſdom of the will divine
To ſubſtitute frail reaſon in its ſtead:
Whoſe paler fires a falſe illuſion prove,
And oft miſguide him in the dangerous way.
So *pious*, that his ſuperſtitious zeal
Bends to an image, conſecrates a grove,
Treats lifeleſs matter as the cauſe of life,

And

And all things but a God, as God adores.
So *juſt*, he dares with intereſt in view,
Renounce his friend, his country, and his king.

Does thy aſpiring ſoul with honeſt pride
Seek fair preeminence? or hope to ſhine
Diſtinguiſh'd high among the race of men?
Such ſhalt thou be, ſtill honour'd, ſtill approv'd,
Like *Hardwicke* the delight of human kind,
If all thy labours tend to public good.

Trace but the ſteps whence grandeur firſt aroſe,
Whence kingſhip claim'd ſubjection: it appears
That thro' each age the ſeat of pow'r, was made
A free-will off'ring to ſuperior virtue,
Man to ſociety by weakneſs form'd,
From mutual int'reſt, mutual wants reliev'd;
Taught by ſelf-love, his neighbours foe repell'd

Who next had been his own: the world increas'd
And miſchief multiplied:—tribe warr'd with tribe,
And private wrongs brought thouſands to the field:
Some chief o'er theſe, in arts and arms renown'd,
In action tried,—neceſſity impos'd.
Him they obey'd, ſubmitting to indure
A partial evil for a gen'ral good;
To whom, when fortune gave the well-fought field,
Were paid the honours of a leafy crown,
And the firſt place at nature's temp'rate feaſt.
Such honours *Theſeus*, ſuch *Alcides* gain'd,
Such *Codrus*, ſuch *Epaminondas* was,
Such, he who at *Thermopylæ* expir'd,
Such too, tho' late if heav'n our vows befriend
The king and leader of aſſembled hoſts,
More than *Atrides* great, imperial *George*,
Honour'd thro' life, ſhall be in death ador'd.

But erring gratitude their worth o'erpaid,
And gave degen'rate ſons their fathers pow'r:
Youths who ne'er knew the horrors of the war,
Or learnt humanity by feeling woe:
Who without virtue were to pow'r allied;
Without true grandeur, play'd at being great;
And thoughtleſs of the mighty truſt, became
Hereditary tyrants o'er mankind.
The father of his country now no more
Foremoſt in danger, led her hoſts to war;
In lazy pride high ſeated on his throne
The monarch rag'd:—the ſlaves went forth and died.
Yet fill'd with praiſe for merits not their own,
And giddy with ſtupendous height of pow'r,
The lords of earth contended to be gods,
Without the lower virtues of a man.

Yet ſtill in ev'ry clime, thro' ev'ry age,
Some glorious chief, ſome god-like *Brutus* roſe;
Who in the ſacred cauſe of Virtue fir'd,
Hurl'd from their thrones the *Tarquins* of the earth;
Bad fancied greatneſs own her want of pow'r,
And proud oppreſſion feel the woes ſhe made.

But he who ſaid that the world's diſtant din
Roll'd o'er his grotto, might perhaps object
All are not born to empire or command,
And theſe are only leſſons to a few.
Juſt tho' the charge, yet our affections ſhow
All have a ſhare and int'reſt in the great,
Whoſe ſtrong example rules a meaner world.
Think then, ye great, what further ye can add,
To Virtue's ſcale your errors to outweigh;
Since all the buſineſs of the preſent hour

Is to reform the follies of the laſt.
Tho' man thro' frailty, oftner is employ'd
To ſtrike out ſome deluſion for the next.

Tho' the firſt goodneſs is to fly from ill,
And the firſt wiſdom folly's paths to ſhun;
A nobler teſt of Virtue is requir'd.
Free agents here with liberty to chooſe,
Our firſt concernment ſhould be chuſing right;
The reſt belongs to heaven: which works unſeen
And leaves us fully ſatisfied to know,
All that it does, is for the good of all.
Vainly we ſeek her reaſons to explore;
As vainly of imputed ills complain:
For oft in public, as in private life,
Misfortune ſaves us, and ſucceſs deſtroys.

Stateſman, whoe'er thou art that do'ſt retain
Thy country's love inherent in thy breaſt,
Benevolently anxious for mankind:
By day and night, with ever waking eye,
Penſive, the *Greek* and *Roman* page reſolve.
There, ſhall thy mind contemplative, obſerve
Whence empire's rais'd by gods, to ruin fell.
There, from unerring reaſons, ſhalt thou find
The moral world and animal ſubſiſt
Alike by temp'rate uſe of fortune's gifts:
That ſtill the end muſt anſwer to the means;
That as from Virtue, fortitude, and truth,
Domeſtic and external bleſſings flow;
By wild ambition, and tyrannic rule,
Nations and individuals are deſtroy'd.
And when confeſs'd the fatal cauſe appears,
Why *Rome* and all her *Cæſars* are no more;

When

When thou ſhalt ſee, more terrible than war
How luxury reveng'd a conquer'd world;
Thy gen'rous breaſt ſhall labour with a pang
To ſave thy Ilium nodding to her fall.
Thy precepts ſhall the ſource of woes explain;
And thy life, teach how to avoid the fate
Of mighty nations by ſucceſs undone,
With ſmiling ruin pleas'd, and diſſolutely gay.

Nor think with ſchoolmen 'tis enough to know;
But into life tranſplant th' unerring rules,
Taught by the full-fraught page, alike to ſhine
In arts, or arms, in council, or the field.
So *Stair* from *Ceſar*, learnt to guide the war;
So taught by *Tully*, equal *Murray* ſhints.

Unenvied ſame thoſe virtues muſt enjoy,
Which tend ſo nobly to our country's good.

Love of our country is impreſs'd by heav'n;
The ſoul it ſeizes firſt, and quits it laſt.
Vainly the cheriſh'd paſſion thoſe deride,
Who leap all mounds which guard ſociety.
Ev'n rigid Virtue may the fault forgive,
If partial fondneſs for our country's good,
Outweigh the gen'ral love we bear mankind.

Britannia hail! O bleſt with heav'ns firſt gift!
Thou happieſt iſle, with liberty enrich'd,
By guardian ſeas divided from a world,
How do I love thee? thoſe who love thee not,
But ill repay that freedom they enjoy.
Thy ſhip has from the gods protection found,
To ſhun the latent miſchiefs of the deep:
Tho' circling whirlpools to ingulph thee ſtrove,
When half abſorb'd, thee *Neptune* ſtill ſuſtain'd

Rais'd on his trident, till the waves renew'd,
Reſtor'd thee lightly bounding o'er the main.
When angry clouds the face of heaven deform'd,
And foaming billows laſh'd thy bulging ſides,
And lightnings thro' the void terrific ſtream'd,
Some pitying pow'r forbad impending fate,
And held thy danger worthy of a God.
Superior to the ſtorm thy veſſel roſe,
And freedom's op'ning port triumphantly regain'd.

But oh beware, thou favour'd of the gods,
Whom danger cannot, pleaſure may deſtroy;
And eaſe unnerve, whom toils could ne'er ſubdue.
The fatal *Sirens* for thy ruin wait,
Their artful ſnares with deafen'd ears avoid;
And croud thy ſwelling ſails, and tug thy lengthen'd oars:
Leſt angry heaven ſhould wreck thee on that coaſt,
Or fix thee to a rock, dire monument of wrath.

O may thy children to the end of time,
Preſerve that freedom which their virtue gain'd!
Spurn uſurpation, force with force repel,
And bid the daring proud invader know,
White clifted *Albion*, equally avoids
Dependent kingſhip, and deſpotic ſway:
Whoſe jealous care for ſacred liberty
Has to this whiter æra been preſerv'd,
Her native rights when lawleſs pow'r invades,
When monarchs graſp at arbitrary ſway,
Boldly ſhe claims her empire to be free,
Marks her ſtrict juſtice to a wond'ring world,
And drives the tyrant exil'd from the land.

For this great end immortal *William* came,
To ſave us from the worſt of human ills,
From more than death, the lois of liberty.

The

The will divine a people's voice declar'd,
And to a throne ſuperior Virtue rais'd.
Lord of a willing world, the monarch reign'd,
And boldly to *Olympus* made his way.
Nor, ev'n in death, the mighty charge forgot,
Tho cauſe of liberty for which he liv'd:
But provident of future good, ſecur'd
A glorious line of Kings, to Virtue dear,
Whom fate decrees, till nature ſink with age,
To make us glorious, and maintain us free.
The gift of Nations, they ſhall ſtill revolve,
Fond of that liberty which made them great;
And conſcious of our worth, with pride confeſs
Their only right to pow'r is from our free aſſent.

While *Cæſar* with a faith to kings unknown,
The ſanction of his promis'd world upholds,
And falling empires by his pow'r ſuſtains,

Juſtice

Juſtice and He againſt the conq'ring ſide,
While ev'ry act of his conſpicuous life,
Due to the people, for their eaſe employ'd,
His the great labour, the rich harveſt theirs,
Prove him devoted to the publick good:
While truth preſides, and juſtice bears the ſword,
And laws are made by popular aſſent,
And ev'ry ſcience its *Mecænas* finds;
In conſcious Virtue bold, the muſe may hope,
Her humble ſtrains ſhall fair acceptance meet,
Tho' far beneath the theme, nor worthy *Pelham*'s ear.

F I N I S.